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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the role of the placement office in a liberal arts setting, responds to key issues attracting and assisting the liberal arts student into and through the placement process, and reviews the demands that may be put on placement offices in the future. Issues discussed concern the change in social setting on campus, the market conditions in various fields, the size and complexity of placement service staffs, the shortage of employers visiting the campus, student needs, the interview and resume writing process, and career planning and development. (MJM)

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COLLEGES AND CAREERS

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Placement Services on today's campuses are an area within which the change in direction, focus, energy, efforts, and financial support may need to take place. After almost a generation within which the college graduate was eagerly sought after and desired, we are entering an era within which the non-technical graduate is having an increasingly difficult time finding his way. That which follows points to some of the issues that I see and some of the solutions which are potentially available. In so doing I talk from a point of weakness not strength. I am not a placement officer and have not been directly involved in college placement. Thus my perspective comes from uninvolvement in the direct process but complete immersion in activities which are generically called student affairs and student services.

Many things have changed and some of these need no repetition. The job market is tighter. Industrial organizations are cutting back on frills; the extraneous is going as the corporate belt is tightened. The student community is increasingly restive over opportunities in the world outside. What can I do with my degree is a frequent question. Administrators, counselors, and the general public are all of a sudden concerned with what follows the collegiate years, and how a person becomes a productive member of society. One basic thesis should not be ignored in the following discussion. The purpose of a college education for all of the students presently attending and likely to attend is not solely a job, a vocation, or a career. Whereas there are many who are concerned with what do you do with a college education, this

question while not unimportant is also not central. Colleges do not exist solely to help prepare [illegible] jobs, or help people earn a living. Though liberal arts is often a stepping stone into the professional area, one errs in considering liberal arts students as either being prepared for or directed toward a job or profession solely on the basis of the curriculum pattern that the student has followed. Job, occupation, and career may well have to emerge from other influences and sources. This the subject that follows:

Just how does one begin in this present climate to attract and assist the liberal arts student into and through a placement process? For the present decade, a number of new issues and responses will demand our attention.

ISSUE: The nature of the college had shifted and the student is found in a number of different social settings.

RESPONSE: The placement staff will have to reach out to where the student is. Placement offices within the college structure or within the central campus will have to reach into where the student is, where he lives, where he eats, and where he studies to call attention to the services and the facilities provided. The typical monthly placement bulletin, available on request, is not adequate. The college newspaper, bulletin boards, visually attractive displays in the student union, posters and brochures widely distributed will have to be attractive to the student's interest and command his attention. Wide and ready distribution of data and information through traditional and

non-traditional channels will have to be attempted.

ISSUE: The faculty is not generally aware of market conditions in their fields and for the college as a whole.

RESPONSE: Someone needs to become more knowledgeable about manpower planning studies, about state employment service projections, of economic forecasts, and of employment market conditions in a variety of industries and employment classifications. The placement director is this someone. To use this knowledge and information wisely, ways to share this with the faculty consitituency will have to be developed. The campus newspaper, again, local press resources, and periodic bulletins to faculty, sent directly, may well need to be employed. The size of the college and all available communication media will affect the modes best followed to generate the broadest understanding.

ISSUE: The size and complexity of placement service staffs are not likely to increase.

RESPONSE: With the tightening of institutional resources there may be a tendency on the part of campus administrators to neglect the placement services and to provide inadequate funds for supporting their activities. Given lesser resources, or stabilization of what may already be inadequate resources, what then? Student paraprofessionals may well be the answer. For credit, for wages, or for free, students can be trained and employed to provide many of the necessary support service functions for the placement office. Well-trained students can

assist in initial interviews. Students can perform studies of the market or at least search the literature for market information; arranging of interview schedules and programs, development of poster and audio-visual devices and tactics, planning of strategies for informing students.

ISSUE: When jobs were plentiful and there were many candidates for the jobs, there was no shortage of employers coming to the campus. Today with fewer jobs available and just as many candidates employers are not coming to the campus.

RESPONSE: The placement advisor needs to get out from behind his desk and beat the hustings. Colleges will have to initiate contacts with employers within their immediate environs. Organizations that formerly recruited on the campus but have stopped doing so, may be encouraged to recruit by mail. Placement directors will visit employers on the employers' turf and offer the college's services to meet employers' needs. Alumni resources will be tapped and developed through a long slow painstaking process.

ISSUE: Students want to do things other than work right after college.

RESPONSE: While we have long recognized that not all students intend to work immediately after graduation and that many will continue on in graduate school, only the very best students obtain any help from the college. The high achievers get help from the department in which they have majored, or a professor or two therein. The good to excellent students receive no help. Students seeking careers in the health professions usually flounder and stumble,

seeking to enter schools for which they might not be qualified. Placement really needs to broaden its perspectives from business and industry, to other domains: graduate schools, professional schools (including law, medicine, business); government service; state and local government service; social welfare agencies (which may not always want the professionally trained). The end of the draft does not end recruiting for the military service; an all-volunteer army suggests an activity for which there will be vigorous high caliber recruiting. Placement directors will have a role to play in these arenas.

ISSUE: Many students do not know how to interview; how to write a resume, and have had too few work experiences.

RESPONSE: There will have to be a marked shift in attitude and response. Students do not want to admit that they need help in presenting themselves, their experiences, and their desires to potential employers. Imagination, persistence, creativity, and sympathetic understanding are necessary if much of anything is to be done. Too often we have been scurrilous in our attitude towards students on these matters. We have assumed them to be far more sophisticated and capable than many in fact are or have been. Students do in fact need and many want our aid in the tactics of obtaining employment. That which is recognized as a need by the student needs to be programmatically addressed. The changing economic condition heightens the need for the placement services.

ISSUE: Getting a job comes after knowing what kind of job one is searching for in the first place.

RESPONSE: Placement is but one-half of a major, two-pronged effort. All of that which is discussed above related to placement. What about career planning and career development?

The energies of the college are not focused here. Helping a student get a job and start a career is often interpreted solely as providing him/her with opportunities to interview employers. How the student decides which employers to seek is all too frequently ignored.

Vocational counseling and placement may be two separate organizational activities, on too many campuses no bridge exists between them. Helping the student make career plans and develop career patterns is frequently treated at far too great a distance from the getting of the job. Career planning in the highly technological and changing society within which we live is becoming a lifetime process. As the world of work changes; as roles and responsibilities shift; as new technology takes hold; as that which is simple becomes complex, and the complexities are simplified; the strains on the college will increase. The college needs to be more constant in its efforts to assist the student in making wise or wiser choices.

Choice making is the student's task. Choice assisting is the college's responsibility. The counseling center and the placement service need to become co-ordinate activities. Counseling services and placement activities need to examine the avenues for mutual

exchange, just as good counseling centers and psychiatric staffs exchange clients. Faculty advisors need to be made privy to the counselor's and the placement director's insight on growth and change in students. Team tactics seem to have some promise. The college dean, the counselor, and the placement director should be vigilant in the regard for each other and the support for the other. Communication in the form of regular and frequent exchange is mandatory. Some imperatives as those cited above are the avenues through which placement is to become something other than a version of the locomotive roundhouse---constantly moving in the same well-defined circle.

Career development for students requires consistent efforts and thought. The liberal arts college is not a vocational training program and those who view it as such err deeply. Professional schools recognize that their fields are shifting constantly; but have these shifts been reflected in the insights that they share with students? Did colleges of education inform students that the teaching market was drying up in various disciplines and levels?

While I do not agree that you stop training or teaching because there are too few jobs, the college has some obligation to make it known that there are few jobs, and let the student decide for himself.

On Tuesday of this week the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education release its report on job prospects, entitled "Graduates and Jobs: Adjusting to a New Labor Market Situation." While they

see some upswing this year, the outlook for the decade is likely to remain tight. College attendance remains a good investment for most young Americans, with benefits other than financial returns---including the general ability to lead a more satisfying life. The central theme of the report is that higher learning and governmental agencies refrain from panic reactions because some graduates are unable to find suitable employment.

The Commission apposes manpower planning models for higher education and sees the following trends:

-- bright prospects for health care occupations and professions;

-- favorable prospects in accounting and salaried managerial positions;

-- least favorable prospects for teachers in elementary and secondary schools and on college faculties.

Beyond these predictions the Commission urges broad college training as apposed to specialization, careful selection of occupation, stopping out to enhance experiences that will lead to wiser job choices, and development of realistic job and earning expectations.

Such are the thoughts I would share on careers, placement and the liberal arts student. If support services, including placement, are to be extant in five years some new approaches, some new techniques, and some major resolutions need to be adopted.

I am frequently reminded of John Gardner's observation that any society to be great and good requires both good philosophers and good plumbers. For without both neither our theories nor our pipes will hold any water.

The challenges we face remain as he described them. Are we equal to this challange in the climate of today?